POLITICS, POWER AND IDEOLOGY IN AMERICAN COMEDY
LATE NIGHT TALK SHOWS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS

FARAH ABDUL-JABBAR MAHDI AL-MNASEER

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA
2013
POLITICS, POWER AND IDEOLOGY IN AMERICAN COMEDY
LATE NIGHT TALK SHOWS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

By
FARAH ABDUL-JABBAR MAHDI AL-MNASEER

A Dissertation Submitted to
the School of Education and Modern Languages
Universiti Utara Malaysia
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics

©Farah Abdul-Jabbar Al-Mnaseer, 2013 All rights reserved
Permission to Use

In presenting this thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree from Universiti Utara Malaysia, I agree that the Universiti Library may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for the copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purpose may be granted by my supervisor(s) or, in their absence, by the Dean of Awang Had Salleh Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to Universiti Utara Malaysia for any scholarly use which may be made of any material from my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of materials in this thesis, in whole or in part, should be addressed to:

Dean of Awang Had Salleh Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
UUM College of Arts and Sciences
Universiti Utara Malaysia
06010 UUM Sintok
Abstrak

Terdapat trend baru dalam rancangan muallewat malam (LNTSs) yang mengupas isu-isu politik. Presiden Amerika Syarikat, Barack Obama, mempamerkan bagaian isu-isu politik dalam LNTSs tersebut bersifat komedi. President Barack Obama, dengan menggunakan berbagai hubungan kuasa dan ideologi politik dalam sesi wawancara televisi. Walaupun banyak kasus telah dijelaskan tentang hubungan LNTSs dengan wacana politik, namun kajian hubungan pemaparan kuasa dalam LNTSs agak terbatas.

Kajian ini menyelidik kuasa Obama, hubungan kuasa serta ideologi politik beliau yang diperlihatkan dalam dua LNTSs, iaitu The Late Show with David Letterman dan The Tonight Show with Jay Leno. Kajian ini memberitumpuan terhadap cara Obama mempamerkan kuasanya menerusi wacana politik beliau dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis wacana kritis yang merangkum aspek multimodal.


Kata kunci: Asaskuasa, Analisis wacana kritis, Taktik mempengaruhi, Wacana politik, Ideologi politik, Hubungan kuasa
Abstract

There appears to be a new trend in transferring political issues through late night talk shows (LNTSs). The President of the United States, Barack Obama, displayed different types of power relations and political ideologies during the interviews despite the comedic nature of LNTSs. Although studies have been done on the relation between LNTSs and political discourse, only a limited number of studies have looked at the portrayal of power in LNTSs. The purpose of this study is to investigate Obama's bases of power, his power relations and his use of deixis to present his political ideologies in the two American LNTSs; The Late Show with David Letterman and The Tonight Show with Jay Leno. This study focuses on Obama's portrayal of power in his political discourse (PD) using critical discourse analyses (CDA) approach that incorporates multimodal aspects. The study analyzes Obama's linguistic and gestural variables in the transcripts collected through interviews in the two shows. The analysis of the linguistic data applies the systemic functional linguistics approach (SFL) while the analysis of the gestural ones is done in association with eclectic models of non-verbal behaviors. This study has revealed the different bases of power which Obama used in his PD, the influence tactics and the types of power relations which he employed in relation to the shows' hosts; David Letterman and Jay Leno. The study has also identified the personal, temporal and spatial deixis which Obama used to present his ideologies on domestic and international politics. The study conceptualizes frameworks in which power and ideology in PD can fit into a non-traditional context such as LNTSs in order to transfer political information to a much wider audience.

Keywords: Bases of power, Critical discourse analysis, Influence tactics, Political discourse, Political ideology, Power relations
Acknowledgments

This is a project that has taken a lot of time and extensive effort on my part and I am most thankful to Almighty Allah for helping me get through it. During the course of this project, I owe a lot of people my deepest gratitude and appreciation for their support.

I am heartily thankful to my dear supervisor Dr. Anne Althea Christopher for her encouragement, supervision and great support and valuable advice to accomplish this dissertation. I would like to say that she was and will be forever the supervisor, sister and close friend. I would also like to thank Dr. Muhammad Khairi Ahmed and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nurainibt. Yusoff for their valuable advice and support.

I would like to thank my parents for their love and continuous support and I hope they will be proud of me. A special thanks goes to my dear husband Noory for his support and encouragement. Also, I would like to thank my sister Dr. Raghad, my brother Dr. Ali and my sister-in-law Eng Saja who prayed for me day and night to finish my studies and to be happy.

I would like to thank my brother and friend Abdulla Hasson who supported me in achieving my dreams and to be happy forever. Special thanks to Mr. Sami who supported me throughout the years. I would also like to thank Dr. Kadhim Al-Mehrath for his encouragement and valuable advice. I would like to thank my friend Imelda for helping me deal with the relevant documents.

Lastly, I offer my regards and blessings to all those who prayed to Allah for me in order to get my PhD and be successful in my academic study.
# Table of Contents

Permission to use .......................................................... i  
Abstrak ................................................................. ii  
Abstract ............................................................... iii  
Acknowledgements ................................................... iv  
Table of Contents .................................................... v  
List of Tables ......................................................... x  
List of Figures ........................................................ xi  
List of Abbreviations ................................................ xii  

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study .......................................... 1  
1.2 Problem Statement ................................................ 5  
1.3 Research Objectives .............................................. 10  
1.4 Research Questions ............................................... 10  
1.5 Significance of the Study ........................................ 11  
1.6 Scope of the Study ............................................... 13  
1.7 Researcher's Interest in the Study ............................. 17  
1.8 Definition of Terms .............................................. 19  
1.9 Organization of the Study ....................................... 21  
1.10 Chapter Summary ................................................ 21  

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction ......................................................... 23  
2.2 Mass Media and Society ......................................... 23  
2.3 Politics in Entertainment Television .......................... 26
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>American Television Talk Shows: An Overview</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Late Night Talk Shows and the New Political Orientation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>The Tonight Show with Jay Leno</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>The Late Show with David Letterman</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Barack Obama: Personality and Career</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Identity Meaning and Types</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Institutional Roles and their Types in Television Talk Shows</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Discursive Practices, Identity and Role Identifications</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>Questions in Late Night Talk Shows</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>The Concept of Face in Interaction</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>Turn-taking in Relation to Power Identification</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>Political Discourse and Ideology</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>Bases of Power and their Influence Tactics</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>Types of Power Relations in Interaction</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>Discourse, Politics and Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19.1</td>
<td>Michel Foucault's Governmentality Approach</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19.2</td>
<td>Norman Fairclough's Discourse as Social Practice Approach</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19.3</td>
<td>Teun van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19.4</td>
<td>Ruth Wodak's Historical Approach</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistics</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>Deixes Types and Context of Situation</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>Multimodality: Linguistic and Gestural Aspects</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.22.1</td>
<td>Facial Expressions</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.22.2 Gestures and Postures  
2.23  Earlier Studies in the Related Areas  
2.24  Chapter Summary  

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY  
3.1  Introduction  
3.2  Research Design  
3.3  Sample of the Study  
3.4  Data collection  
3.5  Data Analysis  
3.6  Analytical Framework  
3.7  Reliability and Validity  
3.8  Ethical and Legal Considerations  
3.9  Chapter Summary  

CHAPTER FOUR ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION  
4.1  Introduction  
4.2  Analysis of the Interviews  
4.3  A Critical Discourse Analysis of Obama's Bases of Power  
  4.3.1  David Letterman 2007 Interview  
  4.3.2  David Letterman 2008 Interview  
  4.3.3  David Letterman 2009 Interview  
  4.3.4  Jay Leno 2007 Interview  
  4.3.5  Jay Leno 2009 Interview
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.3.6</th>
<th>Jay Leno 2011 Interview</th>
<th>181</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Discussion of Question One</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>A Critical Discourse Analysis of Power Relationships</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.1</td>
<td>David Letterman 2007 Interview</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.2</td>
<td>David Letterman 2008 Interview</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.3</td>
<td>David Letterman 2009 Interview</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.4</td>
<td>Jay Leno 2007 Interview</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.5</td>
<td>Jay Leno 2009 Interview</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.6</td>
<td>Jay Leno 2011 Interview</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Discussion of Question Two</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>A Critical Discourse Analysis of Obama's use of Deixis</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.1</td>
<td>David Letterman 2007 Interview</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.2</td>
<td>David Letterman 2008 Interview</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.3</td>
<td>David Letterman 2009 Interview</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.4</td>
<td>Jay Leno 2007 Interview</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.5</td>
<td>Jay Leno 2009 Interview</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.6</td>
<td>Jay Leno 2011 Interview</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Discussion of Question Three</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Common Themes in Obama's Political Discourse</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.1</td>
<td>Obama's Themes at the Foreign Affairs Level</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9.2</td>
<td>Obama's Themes at the Domestic Level</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction 291
5.2 Findings and Conclusions 292
5.3 Significant Contributions 305
5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies 307
5.5 Chapter Summary 309

References 310
List of Tables

Table 1: Kinds of Discursive Practices ....................................................... 56
Table 2: Political Fields and their Types .................................................... 77
Table 3: Power Taxonomy ........................................................................ 82
Table 4: Behavioral Influence Tactics, their Forms, Uses and Directions ........ 85
Table 5: Facial Expressions and their Non-verbal Cues ............................. 126
Table 6: Gestures and Postures and their Inferences ................................. 131
Table 7: Late Night Talk Shows and the Interviews Selected for the Study ..... 147
Table 8: Transcription Annotation Conventions ....................................... 150
Table 9: Common Themes in Obama's Political Discourse ....................... 277
Table 10: Obama's Body Language in American Late Night Talk Shows ...... 304
# List of Figures

| Figure 2.1: | Strategies of Face-Threatening Acts | 66 |
| Figure 5.1: | A Conceptual Framework of the Bases of Power and Influence Tactics in Political Discourse | 293 |
| Figure 5.2: | Power Relations Hierarchy of Political Discourse in Late Night Talk Shows | 297 |
| Figure 5.3: | Processes in Association to Speech Acts | 300 |
| Figure 5.4: | Interruptions Types in Late Night Talk Shows | 302 |
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Political Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNTS(s)</td>
<td>Late Night Talk Shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFL</td>
<td>Systemic Functional Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA(s)</td>
<td>Face-Threatening Acts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Recently, studying political behaviour and examining the exercise of power in a world of changing political ideologies, has received more attention in order to understand how power is exercised in relation to politics. Accordingly, many researchers believe that power, ideology and dominance can be best identified through political discourse (henceforth, PD) (Allan & Garrett, 1998; Bayram, 2010; Chilvers & Burgess, 2008; Howarth, 1999; Karlberg, 2005; Mayr, 2008; McGregor, 2003; Muralikrishnan, 2011; Newman & Clarke, 2009; Stoddart, 2007; van Dijk, 2006, 2008; Wareing, 2004; Wilson, 1990; Wodak, 1988; Woolard, 2010).

Schaffner (1996) classified PD according to two criteria including functional and thematic. As far as the functional aspect is concerned, PD is formulated through politics to fulfil different functions according to the different political activities performed by the politicians. It is thematic because it deals with political issues, relations and ideas. PD is identified as being limited to formal political contexts and political actors and this includes politicians, political institutions, governments, and political media (Abdul-Jabbar, 2005; Chilton, 2004; Hart, 2005; Schaffner, 1996; Wilson, 2004; Wodak, 2009). Nowadays, politics tries to go beyond the theories that limit the PD's context. In Muralikrishnan's (2011) own words,

Political discourse comprises all forms of communication in and by political institutions or actors and all communication with reference to political matters. Political public relations, both internal and external,
The contents of the thesis is for internal user only
REFERENCES


Harmondsworth: Penguin.


Lardner C. M. (2002). What you didn’t say, speak volumes: How body language can be used to understand others. *Michigan Bar Journal, 2*(2).


quantitative and qualitative research. NJ.: Pearson/Merrill Education.


*Review, 13*, 593–618.


Stiles, W.B. (1993). Quality control in qualitative research. *Clinical Psychology*


The Late Show with David Letterman (2009, September 21). Obama on David Letterman's "The Late Show", [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeeM_qFmQjk


349


Viberg, B. (2011). *In the Name of Freedom - A Critical Discourse Analysis of the political discourse in the inaugural speeches of George W. Bush and Barack*


vision strength, leadership style, and context. *The Leadership Quarterly, 12*(1), 53-73.


353


